

1791
A
DISCOURSE
ON
SACRAMENTAL TESTS.

DELIVERED AT CAMBRIDGE

Thursday, October 30th, 1788,

AT A GENERAL MEETING

OF
DEPUTIES OF THE CONGREGATIONS
OF
PROTESTANT DISSENTERS
IN THE COUNTY OF CAMBRIDGE.

By R. ROBINSON.

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1883



PROTECTOR OF THE

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T O
MAJOR GENERAL ADEANE,
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
FOR
THE BOROUGH OF CAMBRIDGE,
THIS
D I S C O U R S E
I S
WITH ALL DUE RESPECT
INSCRIBED.



Matthew xx. 25, 26.

Jesus said: Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they, that are great, exercise authority upon them: BUT IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU.

THE most violent prejudice, that ever was formed against the christian religion, is that which is taken from the means employed to support it. People say, and they say truly, a divine revelation, suppose such a thing, must have in itself motives of credibility, and, if it have, force must be in all cases unnecessary, and in most extremely dangerous. The profession of the christian religion, they add, is supported, not by argument, but by secular authority. Christianity therefore is not divine.

We call this, however, a prejudice, and by a very plain distinction we more than dissolve the prejudice; we convert this objection against christianity into an argument in defence of it. Christianity is to be considered in two different views: the one as it is represented in the doctrine and precepts of Christ, and

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the other as it is described in the doctrine and precepts of some of his followers. That these are very different, and that the one is subversive of the other, a comparison of the text with the institutes of some christians most clearly proves. The princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them; but it shall *not* be so among you: This is pure scripture. The princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them; and *it shall* be so among you: This is christianity corrupted. The first is credible because it is just: The last appears incredible, because Almighty God cannot be the author of a rational religion so defective in motives of credibility as to need the aid of secular power to support its credit in the world.

That our Lord speaks here of human authority over *religion*, I take for granted. If proof be necessary, let us observe the words. The princes of the *Gentiles* exercise dominion. It was not civil government, then, common to both Jews and Gentiles, which Jesus forbade: but it was such dominion as heathen monarchs exercised, but which the kings of the Jews did not. The written law of Moses was the religion of the Jews, and the legislator had said, ye shall not *add*, neither shall you *diminish aught*. Observe all the words of *this* law, it is your life. The Jewish kings were required to write a *copy* of the law, but they had no authority to alter a word. It was not so with the Gentiles, and the lesson that was read to-day immediately before prayer, the third chapter of Daniel, was intended to inform us what dominion the Lord prohibited in the text. A christian prince must not govern like a pagan; he must not either invent a false religion, or support a true one by force.

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By what mistaken management, then, hath it come to pass, that the disciples contradict their master: that in a case of which he expressly says, It shall *not* be, they presume to affirm, it *shall* be. This is the question which we are going to answer, not by quoting texts, but by reporting a few facts, which account for the intrusion of dominion into the church. The narration may serve to shew the injustice of human authority over conscience, and to exculpate modern governors who certainly had no concern in the introduction of it, and of course have no blame for finding it there. Whether they will acquire the praise, as it is in their power, of casting this demon out, must be left to themselves to determine.

Parents and Guardians were the first who exercised this dominion. Christianity was first taught in a province of the Roman empire. From thence it diffused itself into all the provinces, where the *patria potestas*, the absolute power of parents over their children was an ancient right. There the condition of minors formed a difficult case. Might a christian guardian of rich pagan minors initiate his wards into the christian church? Could a pagan guardian prevent a christian minor's initiating himself? Was a christian master of a charity school of pagan orphans to be justified by law for incorporating his pupils under age into the christian church? Could a minor dispose of himself? At Alexandria in Egypt, and at Carthage in Africa the question was agitated. At Alexandria they did receive youths under age into the church. At Carthage a celebrated christian lawyer advised the church to defer the admission of them. In time, however, the interested turned the scale, and the ad-

mission of minors, and even of babes almost universally prevailed.

Some apology may be made for the Alexandrians. They had some extraordinary youths in their school. Origen was a young man of forward and uncommon parts, and the church appointed him Catechist at the age of eighteen, when seven years were wanting to complete his majority. Seven of his young disciples had the courage to suffer martyrdom, of whom five had been initiated into the church by baptism, for which the other two were preparing. After the time of Origen, the celebrated Didymus was of this school. This child lost his sight when he was about five years of age. He had pleased himself with the hope of becoming a scholar, and had enjoyed his sight long enough to learn the magnitude of his loss. When his heart was ready to burst with grief, he heard somebody read the nineteenth of Matthew, where the Lord speaks of the difficulty of the salvation of a rich man, and makes use of these words, *with men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible*. His troubled heart laid hold of the last words, *with God all things are possible*, and he became a petitioner to God to repair his loss by enlightening his mind. A friend said, Be not uneasy, Didymus, for though it hath pleased Providence to deprive you of natural sight, such as flies and other little animals enjoy, yet he hath given you such powers as those, with which angels behold the Majesty of God. In brief, Didymus by indefatigable attention became a scholar, eminent in several sciences, so that he was appointed to preside in the school, where he educated many, who were afterwards great men. He dictated and published many books, and in
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very advanced age, some say his ninety-third year, he departed this life adorned with reputation by his survivors.

In peculiar cases, no doubt, persons may understand and believe the christian religion in early life, and in them it is an act of discretion to dispose of themselves by embracing the christian profession without waiting for forms of human law, which the wisdom of legislators hath regulated, not by peculiar cases, but by the general condition of mankind. The argument for minority doth not apply to infancy, and as a profession of any thing ought not to be imposed upon a child, much less ought the profession of a religion to be imposed upon a natural infant, who in this respect is an irrational animal, that doth not know, and cannot consent at all.

We suppose, our Saviour in the text forbid the exercise of this parental dominion in his favour. It was to his honour that he did so, for had he directed: Impose my name upon all your descendants without their knowledge or consent: Introduce the unjust and capricious *patria potestas* of the Romans into my kingdom, and let the christian church be the wise and the ignorant, the profligate and the pure: he would have rendered his gospel suspected. It would have seemed what it ought not to seem, as if it shrunk from a fair investigation.

This dominion, which hath been exercised for many ages, continues to be so. When children first begin to think, christianity is not proposed to their examination, but they are informed they are christians already

already disposed of by a contract made for them by proxies, whom they are taught to call godfathers, and godmothers, who promised and vowed three things in their name, that they should renounce Satan and the pomps of the world, that they should believe all the articles of the christian faith, and that they should keep God's holy commandments all the days of their lives; and when they are asked whether they hold themselves bound to perform these engagements of their proxies, each is taught to answer, Yes verily, and by God's help so I will.

I hope, such of you, my brethren, as practise the baptism of infants, will not imagine I am censuring you. You baptize infants because you sincerely believe infant baptism is agreeable to scripture, but you do not incorporate them into your churches. You defer this till they arrive at years of discretion, and then, laying aside all compulsion, you admit them because they desire to be admitted, upon proof that they have thought for themselves, and are christians on their own conviction of the truth of christianity. This is a case different from that of infant church membership, and extremely so from that of youth in some countries, who would renounce their infant initiation at the hazard of their lives. There parental dominion reigns in all its horror. Parents are compelled to exercise it, and their children are doomed to suffer all its consequences.

Imperial dominion is a second kind of authority, which christian princes have introduced into the christian church. The title and the power of *Pontifex maximus*, high priest, had been assumed by pagan emperors

perors long before any of them professed the christian religion, and Julius Cæsar was high priest as well as Constantine. It was an office of great dignity, extensive patronage, and absolute power in the state. When Constantine entered into the christian church he brought along with him all his imperial titles, and his absolute dominion. Like a true politician he joined himself to the most numerous and the most powerful party of christians, and they, being at the same time the least enlightened, and the most depraved of all other parties of christians, taught him to exercise his pagan authority over all his subjects both pagan and christian. They flattered him, that he was a judge of their speculations, which they called articles of faith, that it was his duty to regulate a ceremonial, and to support both by the omnipotence of his imperial power. They persuaded him, this was the christian religion, and they interpreted his dreams into divine visions, in order to convince him, and to bear down the populace, that Almighty God had miraculously raised him up to support a faction, and to oppress the rest of mankind for his glory.

When this first christian emperor issued edicts to destroy pagan temples and sacrifices; when he arranged a priesthood, erected christian temples, and endowed churches, he acted constitutionally, for the pagan *Pontifex maximus* had always been considered as the judge and arbitrator of divine and human affairs. The institution was nearly coeval with Rome, and it was a law of the twelve tables, that no person should worship any new or foreign god, unless authorised by publick authority. If the pagan Romans tolerated all religions, it was not owing to a necessity of law, but to

a wise though unwritten policy, which usually regulated the affairs of that brave and generous people. Unhappily, Constantine rejected this sound policy, and by becoming a partizan, and taking a side, threw all the empire into a confusion, which issued in the dismemberment and destruction of it.

Imperial power over the religion of the people fell with the empire into the hands of various civil governors, and in this country it resides in ours. The legislative power have adopted a plan of faith and practice prepared by the clergy of one party, and the executive power hath the prerogative of supporting it. *The princes of the Gentiles exercise authority over them, and it shall be so among you.*

A third kind of dominion I call, for distinction sake, *feudal*. In former times a set of adventurers issued out of their forests, subdued a country thinly inhabited, destroyed or enslaved the natives, divided the lands among themselves, peopled their wastes with captives and slaves, denominated themselves lords, and ruled without controul. Men, women, children, cattle, utensils, the natural and artificial produce, all were the property of the lord, and his will their only law. When vast districts had been so peopled, and when these feudal lords began to think of civilizing their slaves, they parcelled out their lands, and erected manfes, which in time became villages, in each of which they set up a building for the service of God, placed a priest to preside over the religion of the tenants, endowed the service with house and lands, and ordered the payment of what are now called tithes. On the demise or the removal of the incumbent, the
Lord

Lord, not the tenants, appointed his successor. The tenants were not supposed capable of judging, and they were never consulted. Hence no affection in the people, and no emulation in the priest. This dominion of patronage remains, although the reason of it hath long since vanished. In barbarous times, pagans and slaves, incapable to judge because deprived of the means, apt to mutiny because galled with a yoke of bondage, and in a country where the supreme governour was only the strongest feudal lord, and when there was no law, no civil order, no safe and regular succession, it might be prudent to suspend the right of election: but how can this argument be urged against an enlightened, peaceable and well governed nation of freemen? They select their friends, choose their professions, employments and diversions, prefer their wives, appoint their physicians, nominate their representatives in the state, free in all when they do not interrupt civil order, and why the same men, so capable in other cases, may not elect their ministers, who can assign a satisfactory reason? Assuredly, this text cannot be quoted, *Among the Gentiles they that are great exercise authority over them, but it shall not be so among you.*

To mention only one article more. *Hierarchical* power is a sort of dominion, which the text forbids. It is, I think, a popular error, but it is not, I presume, an error of this assembly, that the hierarchy of Rome originated with such plain men as you, the mere teachers of primitive christians, then denominated, as the inspectors of a road, and the overseers of any company were, bishops. Your societies have no idea of establishing christianity, they have not even the

scheme of popery in contemplation. Your congregations have order, but no authority. One member claims no authority over another member within your churches: and one of your congregations does not pretend to exercise authority over any other congregation. Had Christ our master and Lord delegated his authority to any individual, or to any collective body, he would have sown the seed of a spiritual monarchy, which to have supported itself must have become a secular dominion; and the head of it a worldly power able to contend with and subdue Emperours and Kings: but he did not institute such an authority at all, and no man can shew his warrant for the exercise of it. Fraternal order he did institute, but *dominion* he expressly forbade: and Jesus is guiltless of all the oppression that hath been exercised, and all the blood that hath been shed by his ill-informed followers in his name.

Numa Pompilius, the second king of Rome, ages before Jesus was born, was the man, who framed for purposes of government a pagan hierarchy, and monks were the men who introduced it with success into the catholick church. With catholicks it is a common saying, If Saint Benedict, the father of western monachism, had never preached, Saint Peter, the apostle of Jesus, might have gone a begging. There is, moreover, this difference between the pagan and the papal hierarchy, the first only regulated a ritual which left opinion free, but the last beside a ceremonial established articles of faith.

The catholick church of Rome was of little account, and made no figure before the council of Nice, and it owes its splendour and power chiefly to two events:

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The removal of the seat of empire from Rome to Constantinople by Constantine, and the inundation of the monks. When the people of Rome chose a monk for their bishop, since known by the name of Gregory the great, their state was very low. At the beginning of the sixth century, they had only one king in the world in their community, Clovis, king of the Salii, a nation of Franks (all the rest were Pagans or Arians): but when Gregory became bishop of Rome, he employed monks to extend his empire every where. Into this country he sent one Augustine, accompanied by forty other monks, in his own style, to convert the nation to the christian faith, that is, in our's, to impose upon a free people by the aid of the civil power monachism in the name of christianity. Austin desired a conference with the British christians, who without interrupting government had been long peaceably cultivating their lands and adoring their God. The Britons sent a deputation to meet him, with direction to observe his deportment. If he should appear to resemble Jesus in meekness and lowliness, they were to give him the right hand of fellowship: but if he should behave with haughtiness, they were to return as they went. Austin received them with insolence, and took the tone of authority. The Britons, open to reason but averse to force, returned. The barbarous monk, better acquainted with his missal than with the new testament, and more true to the secret orders of his master at Rome than to the prohibition of Jesus in the text, pretended that rejection of *himself* was contempt of GOD, and prophesied the destruction of all the British christians. This was soon after effected by the sword, which, it is credible, was unsheathed only by the intrigues of the devout missionary.

The land being thus converted, more than seven long centuries did a succession of monks continue to fascinate the wise, and to frighten the weak, into zeal for mysteries which none of them understood, into absolute obedience to a foreigner, who was both a secular prince and a high priest, and who governed by his will, or by a code of foreign law, and into the loss of all that their remote ancestors had held most dear. By a wise order of Providence, in time the ill produced its own cure, and the oppression became so general and so intolerable that an inquiry into the cause began, and by due process inquiry ended in the reformation. A noble design, but executed only in part. Had all dominion over conscience been banished, every thing else would have fallen into its own proper place: but though monks were expelled, idols dismounted, ceremonies reformed, and foreign authority disowned; yet that, which had produced all former abuses, remained, dominion over conscience, only it was vested in the king.

By the way, it is not accurate to speak of a constitution in church and state, as if the church were half the state, or as if the British constitution consisted of two independent empires in alliance, because the truth is, the executive power distributes the religion of the state by the clergy, exactly as the same executive power distributes the wealth, the protection, and the law of the state, by other classes of state-officers. We do not say, constitution in law and state, or in army and state, or in exchequer and state, for all these are creatures of state, branches of civil government, and such is the church.

To return. Under this authority, Protestants, who had been in exile for resisting foreign dominion over conscience, returned home, and without a blush, exercised the same kind of dominion over their fellow subjects, some of them too their fellow sufferers. Ecclesiastical government was the fatal rock on which all reformers dashed. Once allow the principle, that conscience will admit of other than *self*-government, and you introduce confusion and every evil work to determine *who* shall govern, the presbyter, the prince, the bishop or the pope.

From the reformation to the revolution oppression excited inquiry. Some examined the original records of christianity, others studied the rise, the nature, and the extent of civil government, together with the ancient usages of our remote ancestors, and the most concluded that tyranny in every form and in every degree was an interruption of social happiness, and that of all countries in the world Britain had the deepest interest in making her inhabitants perfectly free.

Protestants of those times examined the affair of dominion to the bottom. By reading the genuine scriptures, they found, Christ had not empowered any one christian to rule the conscience of another, or any one society of christians to impose laws of religion upon another. They observed, he had expressly forbidden the exercise of ALL dominion of this kind. By studying civil government, they understood that a good civil magistracy took cognizance of only overt acts, which disturb the peace of society. By reading our ancient records they concluded, that authority over conscience was as unconstitutional in this kingdom as it was unjust

just in itself. They objected, that Queen Elizabeth, on one day, by sound of trumpet, received the whole nation into her church, and then held all fast bound by arbitrary laws. They remarked, that subscription to thirty or forty speculations of the schools contributed nothing to the peace of society, but that the imposition of it tended only to divide, disturb, and distress: that it was unjust to oblige men to declare their unfeigned assent and consent to all things contained in a book, which compelled them often in every year to pronounce a sentence of inevitable destruction on all Arians and Socinians, and yet, when the same people died, to pronounce them dear brethren, and to pray that their own souls might rest with theirs in heaven. They added many other objections against the book. They rejected canonical obedience to an ordinary upon oath. In brief, they refused to conform, and for non-conformity they suffered fines and bonds, exile and death. I own, it is not in my power to censure this numerous host of christians. Would I, a freeborn native of this enlightened country, exchange my christian liberty for a state of such servility? I would not. To say nothing of the gospel, the Briton in my soul (forgive the expression) a laudable pride of birthright would forbid me.

The justice of these remonstrances, and others proceeding from the same love of liberty, carried conviction into all men's minds, and in due time produced the glorious revolution of sixteen hundred eighty eight: but, glorious as the revolution was, it was not, however, perfect, for although liberty was declared the unquestionable birthright of all Englishmen, yet liberty of conscience was offered to a large part of the nation
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only on condition of their resigning some of their most honourable birthrights; and taking the sacrament according to the usage of the church of England was made a test of competency to hold any civil or military office. This was done much against the will of the king, and many members of parliament, and all the disinterested part of the nation.

Some noble lords of the upper house left upon record a protest, which clearly discovers what they thought of this remnant of ancient tyranny. This is part of it.

“ We dissent. 1. Because it gives great part of the protestant freemen of England reason to complain of inequality and hard usage, when they are excluded from publick employments by law: And also because it deprives the king and kingdom of divers men fit and capable to serve the publick in several stations, and that for a mere scruple of conscience, which can by no means render them suspected, much less disaffected to the government.

2. Because his majesty, as the common and indulgent father of his people, having expressed an earnest desire of liberty for tender consciences to his protestant subjects: And my lords the bishops having divers of them, on several occasions professed an inclination to, and owned the reasonableness of such a temper: We apprehend it will raise suspicion in some men's minds of something else than the care of religion, or the publick, and different from a design to heal our breaches, when they find that by confining secular employments to ecclesiastical conformity, those are shut out from
civil

civil affairs, whose doctrine and worship may be tolerated by authority of parliament, there being a bill before us by order of the house to that purpose, especially when without this exclusive rigour the church is secured in all her privileges and preferments, nobody being hereby let into them who is not strictly conformable.

3. Because to set marks of distinction and humiliation on any sort of men, who have not rendered themselves justly suspected to government, as it is at all times to be avoided by the makers of just and equitable laws, so may it be particularly of ill effect to the reformed interest both at home and abroad at this present conjuncture, which stands in need of the united hands and hearts of all protestants.

4. Because it turns the edge of a law (we know not by what fate) upon protestants and friends to the government, which was intended against papists, to exclude them from places of trust, as men avowedly dangerous to our government and religion: And thus the taking the sacrament which was enjoined only as a means to discover papists, is now made a distinguishing duty amongst protestants, to weaken the whole by casting off a part of them.

5. Because mysteries of religion and divine worship are of divine original, and of a nature so wholly distinct from the secular affairs of politick society, that they cannot be applied to those ends; and therefore the church by the law of the gospel, as well as common prudence, ought to take care neither to offend tender consciences within itself, nor give offence to those

those without, by mixing their sacred mysteries with secular interests.

6. Because we cannot see how it can consist with the law of God, common equity, or the right of any free-born subject, that any one be punished without crime. If it be a crime not to take the sacrament according to the usage of the church of England, every one ought to be punished for it, which nobody affirms: If it be no crime, those, who are capable and judged fit for employments by the king, ought not to be punished with a law of exclusion for not doing that which it is no crime to forbear."

To reasons so substantial it should seem unnecessary to add any thing; I will however take the liberty to subjoin a few other remarks.

This iniquitous test affects the royal prerogative. In a mixed monarchy, like this, where the legislative power commits the executive power to one person, who is obliged by the nature and necessity of the case, to discharge his high trust by employing officers to represent himself, a sacramental is an improper test, because should the monarch observe men ever so capable of serving the state, how much soever their talents and their integrity might recommend them, yet this unrighteous law, more suitable to a bigot than a prince, would forbid the sovereign to appoint them to office.

Nor is this test less inconsistent with the wisdom that constituted parliament. If not receiving the sacrament according to the usage of the church of England do not disqualify a man for sitting in parliament,

ment, why doth it disqualify him for the office of a tidewaiter? Do we require less to qualify a man to hold our most sacred trusts, our properties, our liberties, and our lives, than to fit him to watch the landing of goods at the custom-house?

Some complain of a profanation of a sacred institute. Whether we, sinful men, have any religion, or not, surely there are some, who have given unsuspected proofs of piety, and they say, We always think of the supreme being with the most profound reverence: We consider the worship of him, with the deepest veneration, as the most serious and important business of life; we adore the father of mankind for all his works, and chiefly for sending his son to enlighten our minds, and to regulate our actions, and when we behold the holy institutes of a kingdom not of this world, now imposed upon the wicked, and now refused to the good, diverted from the original end of their appointment, and prostituted to secular purposes, we blush and tremble at the sight.

Nor let it be once imagined that we, who detest impositions of this kind, are selfish for doing so. We know no men, who have more reason to complain of the sacramental test, than the established clergy. By the rubrick they are required to *repel open evil livers from the table of the Lord*: but by the test law they are compelled to admit communicants of no faith, and of profligate manners. Should a conscientious clergyman, after proper notice given, refuse to administer the sacrament to qualify an atheist for holding an office under government, he would expose himself to a law suit, which might end in his ruin.

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Even bad men have an interest in the repeal of the test, for some, who are nominated to offices, know themselves unworthy communicants, and they think if they receive the bread and wine *unworthily* they render themselves *guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*: Should such men be compelled to add this to all their other sins; and can such a crime be necessary to the safety of a state?

But it is not this sort of men, it is not Atheists, Deists, and profligates, upon whom the test law is intended to spend its force, but another, a class of virtuous characters exposed to scorn for imaginary offences called schism and heresy. Yet what have states to do with heresy? They create the crime, and then punish it; but could statesmen be persuaded to let religion alone, there would remain no such crime to be punished. Among the brave and virtuous Goths, there was no such word in all their primitive codes of law, and opinions the most preposterous do no injury to the state, as daily experience proves. Where men's lives are inoffensive their speculations ought to be free. To illustrate this, I beg leave to read a part of what an ancient heretick wrote to the parent of modern orthodoxy, I mean Augustine of Africa. The writer was a Manichean, and I choose one of this denomination because of all hereticks ancient and modern the Manicheans are treated, and by the orthodox (as catholicks call themselves) ever have been treated as the most dangerous members of society, and the last to be suffered to live in any christian state. So very distant have their notions of christianity always been from those of the catholicks, that the latter have never allowed them to be christians.

Augustine had called a Manichean a pagan schismatick, and this is a part of his answer. " You call me a pagan schismatick. The pagans think, they honour the deity by erecting altars, temples and images, and by offering sacrifice and incense. I have quite other notions. I consider myself, if I be not unworthy, a living intelligent temple of the excellent majesty of God: I honour Christ his son as his express image: a mind well-informed, I think, is an altar of the deity, and pure and simple adoration the service and the sacrifice. How then am I a pagan schismatick? For your parts, you have converted pagan sacrifices into love feasts, idols into martyrs, and you worship them, as the pagans do their gods, by votive offerings: You appease the manes of the dead by wine and festivals: with pagans you celebrate pagan solemnities by observing their days: and of their morals you have altered nothing: it is you then, not we, who are pagan schismaticks, and nothing distinguishes you from other heathens but your holding seperate assemblies.

" You ask me whether I believe the gospel? Is that a question to put to a man, who observes all the precepts of it? I might with propriety put the question to you, because your life gives no proof of it. I have left father, mother, wife, children, and whatever else the gospel requires me to renounce; and you ask whether I believe the gospel! I perceive, you do not understand the gospel, which is nothing but the doctrine and precepts of JESUS CHRIST. I have renounced silver and gold, and I carry none in my purse: I am content with daily bread, and I am free from anxiety about to morrow, what I shall eat, and wherewithal I shall

shall be clothed: and you keep asking me, whether I believe the gospel! you behold in me the beatitudes of Christ, the very beatitudes which constitute the gospel: and you ask me whether I embrace the gospel! You see, I am poor in spirit, I am meek, pacifick, and pure in heart, I mourn, I hunger and thirst after righteousness, I suffer hatred and persecution for Christ's sake; and you doubt whether I believe the gospel! We ought no longer to wonder at John the Baptist, who had seen Jesus, and had heard of his works, for sending to inquire whether he were the Messiah. Jesus, with the utmost propriety and dignity, did not condescend to return a direct answer, but referred him to his works, *the blind receive their sight, the deaf hear, the dead rise, and so on.*"

"You say, to receive the gospel is not only to obey the precepts of it, but to believe all things written in it, of which the first is, the nativity of God. This article, however, is not the whole gospel; the precepts of it is the other essential part. Now if you accuse me of not believing the gospel, because I do not admit the history of the birth of Christ, I may, and with much more reason, accuse you of not believing the gospel, because you condemn the precepts of it. For the present, then, we are both alike." Not to be tedious, the substance of the remainder on this article is this: "I, the Manichean, do not believe the genealogies and the history of the birth of Christ, and you, Bishop of Hippo, do admit them. You do not practise the precepts of Christ, and I do practise them. Thus, on your own principles, neither of us admits the whole gospel: but, it must be granted, you have chosen the easy and I the difficult

difficult part: and Jesus hath not affixed the promise of salvation to your part, but he hath to mine. He hath said, *ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you*: but he hath not said, *ye are my friends, if ye believe I was born of a virgin.*"

You see, brethren, I have quoted the worst reprobate I could find: A man who has the presumption to contradict the oracle of the church catholick and anti-catholick; a man who taxed a Saint, and a great Saint, with holding a heterodox faith, and living a wicked life, differing in his morals nothing from a heathen: A man who criticised even the sacred scriptures, whose four-gospels began with the baptism of Jesus, and who discarded the two first chapters of Matthew and Luke: A man, however, of undeniable virtue: Now I ask, not Saint Augustine, who supported his answers by reminding his opponent that the Emperor was his catholick brother in Christ, but I ask you, who, though not Saints, are, however, men of sense and piety, would any one of you charge himself with suppressing by force such a heretick as this, or shedding his blood? Undoubtedly, you would say of such a one, *The Lord judge between thee and me, but my hand shall not be upon thee.* Perhaps, you would go further, and not only abstain from injuring such a man, but you would render him all the kind offices in your power, considering if he were not a christian, he was at least a neighbour, whom the Almighty had commanded you to love as yourself.

In fine, Various as christians are, there is an undisputed point, in which they all agree, *all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them*;

them: for this is the law and the prophets. You are, more than forty congregations in this county worshipping God under the protection of the act of toleration, a handful: but were you ten thousand times as many, and had you the law and the sword in your hands, could any man think it right for your majority (and you would have no other argument) to impose your faith and mode of worship on the rest of the inhabitants? I know you reject the thought, on account of both its absurdity and injustice, for you distinguish between establishing yourselves and establishing christianity. To seat yourselves in all places of honour and profit, to the exclusion of all other natives, would be unjust: and to pretend to establish christianity, which can no more be established than beauty or wit, would be absurd. Let us ask our neighbours, Would they approve of our putting them in the condition into which they have put us? What would they say to us, if we should pretend, that unless all officers civil and military received the sacrament sitting, in our meeting-houses, law would be violated, the treasury exhausted, the constitution subverted, and Great Britain and all her possessions fall into immediate ruin? A midnight tale fit for the tenth century, but not to be repeated now! A seditious tale fit for nothing but to summon men to arms and barbarous deeds to determine which party hath the majority! What conceivable connection can there be between receiving the sacrament according to the usage of any church, and distributing justice, routing an army, or collecting the customs?

To conclude. Nonconformity is a noble cause, and we are engaged in it not by misfortune but by choice,

as many before me can attest. By contending for the sufficiency of scripture we mean to acquire credibility to the gospel, for the gospel itself is credible, and they are human additions and gainful appendages that bring it into contempt. By denying the dominion of parents over the religion of their descendants, we plead the cause of posterity, the liberty of every individual to be, or not to be a professor of the christian religion, as his unbiaſſed reason and conscience ſhall direct him. By denying imperial authority over conscience, we declare our averſion to deſpotical government and pagan religion, which was nothing but ſhow. By rejecting prelacy, we confirm the doctrine of the text; we provide for the improvement of the mind, by affirming the liberty of all christians to act agreeably to their own convictions; particularly we plead the cause of young men preparing for the ministry, that their minds may be unſhackled, that they may not be obliged to allow a concluſion before they have examined the premiſes, that they may have no temptation to prevaricate for reward, and no fear of diſmal conſequences for thinking differently from Greeks and Africans, who lived in times illiterate, and in places remote from us, who are a people as far ſuperior to them as men civilized are to ſavages, or, at beſt, to men in the firſt ſtages of civilization. Inſtead of the uſual train of, firſt faith, then quotation of authorities, and laſtly reaſon, we would firſt reaſon, then build faith upon evidence, and reject all authority to call us to account except that to which Jehovah hath ſaid, *every knee ſhall bow*. By diſowning feudal authority, we only claim that for our conſciences, which all other men in a country free from vaſſallage have claimed for their perſons and properties. We affirm
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the plainness of the gospel, the capability of all men to judge of it, and the right of every one to be free, virtuous, and happy. We put one God in the place of many Lords. When we represent the ancient springs of tyranny, and narrate the inundations of it, we are not insensible of the merit of our ancestors, who cut channels for it, and set bounds to the flood, saying, *hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.* When we ask those, who have it in their power, to dry up the lingering streams that remain, and to restore us our original paradise, where the voice of oppression shall not be heard, we ask no favour, we claim a *birthright*, which we never forfeited by any crime, which it would be ignoble to despise, and abominable to sell for a *mess of pottage*.

May God in all things be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

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